

Lawmakers Work Across Party Lines to Clarify Federal Stalking Statutes and Increase Penalties for Offenders

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Congresswoman Loretta Sanchez (D-CA) and Congresswoman Virginia Foxx (R-NC) today introduced a tough new bill that would strengthen federal anti-stalking laws to address the new technology predators are using to harass their victims. In addition to clarifying existing laws, H.R. 196, the Simplifying the Ambiguous Law, Keeping Everyone Reliably Safe (STALKERS) Act of 2011, would give law enforcement authorities the tools they need to prevent and prosecute stalking in the digital age. The House of Representatives passed this legislation in the 111th Congress.

“Law enforcement must be given the appropriate tools to combat stalking and cyber stalking in the 21st century,” said Rep. Sanchez. “Unfortunately, our laws haven’t been updated to cover harassment through electronic surveillance and other new technologies. I am proud to join Rep. Foxx in introducing this tough new bill, which will take crucial steps to prosecute predators and empower victims.”

“Stalking and cyber stalking are particularly insidious crimes that ruin countless lives each year and it’s past time we gave law enforcement the tools they need to crack down on these predators,” Rep. Foxx said. “This bill will protect women who may be vulnerable to stalkers, especially those who are trying to escape abusive relationships and potential stalkers. I am proud to join Rep. Sanchez in introducing this important legislation and look forward to working with her to see it become law in the 112th Congress.”

Current federal anti-stalking laws are outdated and may not cover all acts of electronic surveillance, including spyware, bugging, video surveillance, and other new technology used by modern-day stalkers.

The legislation empowers law enforcement to prosecute any act of stalking that would be “reasonably expected” to cause a person serious emotional distress. It requires the attorney general to evaluate federal, state, and local efforts to enforce anti-stalking laws and submit an annual report on best practices.

Additionally, the bill increases the punishment for stalking offenses to protect the most vulnerable victims of stalking. Offenders who are convicted for violating protection orders, stalking minors, or stalking the elderly may be sentenced to a maximum additional five years in prison.